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FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0963
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0715

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PHNOM PENH 000505

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

BANGKOK PASS TO S TRAVELING PARTY
STATE FOR EAP/MLS, P, D, IO
PARIS PLEASE PASS TO US MISSION TO UNESCO - S. ENGELKEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KTIA](#) [SCUL](#) [UNESCO](#) [CB](#)
SUBJECT: CAMBODIA SEEKS SUPPORT FOR BID TO JOIN UNESCO
WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

REF: PHNOM PENH 406 AND PREVIOUS

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Secretary of State Long Visalo July 20 appealed for United States support of the bid by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to join the UNESCO World Heritage Committee (WHC). Cambodia will stand in an election for the one open East Asia and Pacific seat on the 21-member WHC at the UNESCO General Conference in October. Long Visalo cited Cambodia's participation in UNESCO since the 1992 inscription of Angkor Wat on the World Heritage List, Cambodia's deep cultural heritage, and its growing experience on the Angkor Wat International Coordination Committee since 1993 as reasons to support the candidacy. This would be Cambodia's first time to sit on the WHC and represents another attempt to seek legitimacy in the international community. Passing a letter from Prime Minister Hun Sen addressed to the President, Long Visalo asked for the continued strong support of the U.S. Government seen in the inscription of the ancient Preah Vihear temple (Reftel) and for its vote. Full text of the diplomatic note and attached letter from Prime Minister Hun Sen to the President is reproduced in paras 6-7. Embassy will deliver the letter to the Desk via registered pouch. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Noting that Cambodia had more than 1000 ancient Khmer temples, Long Visalo told A/DCM that the RGC revered its deep culture and had tried to preserve its heritage dating back hundreds of years. In the Khmer language's deep roots, in Cambodia's unique royal ballet dance, and in the cherished history of shadow puppets could be seen a commitment to the preservation of cultural heritage. Cambodia's establishment of and participation in the International Cooperation Committee (ICC) for Angkor Wat since 1993 was another valuable experience that could be depended on in the WHC, he said.

¶3. (SBU) During the process that led up to the July 2008 inscription of Preah Vihear temple on Cambodia's northern Dangrek Range, the U.S. had shown itself to be a steady friend of Cambodia, Long Visalo added. Since then, Cambodia had shown itself to be a cooperative member in the UN, committed to the peaceful resolution under international law of ongoing dispute over the border with Thailand near Preah Vihear temple. Now the U.S. could once again throw its support behind Cambodia and cast a vote for Cambodia as the East Asia and Pacific Islands group candidate at the WHC, he concluded.

¶4. (SBU) When asked, Long Visalo mentioned that Indonesia had shown a serious interest in promoting its candidacy for the same single seat on the WHC in the EAPI region. He expressed less certainty about the potential candidacy of Thailand, rumors about which he had heard but which he could not confirm. (NOTE: Both Thailand and Indonesia have

reportedly served on the WHC before. This would be a first for Cambodia. END NOTE.)

15. (SBU) A/DCM told the MFA Secretary of State that the request would be conveyed to Washington, although it was often the case that the U.S. did not discuss candidacies in advance of votes with other UN members.

16. BEGIN TEXT OF DIPLOMATIC NOTE:

No. 1013 OI/MFA-IC

COMPLIMENTARY OPENING

...has the honor to enclose herewith a letter dated 8 July 2009 of Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo Hun Sen, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Cambodia, addressed to H.E. Barack H. Obama, President of the United States of America.

The Ministry would be very grateful if the Embassy could kindly forward the enclosed message to its high destination.

COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE

Phnom Penh, 20 July 2009

END TEXT OF DIPLOMATIC NOTE

17. BEGIN TEXT OF LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT:

PHNOM PENH 00000505 002 OF 002

Phnom Penh, 08 July 2009

H.E. Barack H. Obama
President of the United States of America
Washington

Your Excellency,

I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that the Kingdom of Cambodia, State Party to the Convention of 1972 concerning the protection of cultural and natural World Heritage intends to present its candidacy for a seat on the World Heritage Committee during the upcoming Session of the General Conference in October 2009.

The Royal Government is seeking to actively increase our engagement with the international community in order to contribute to the preservation and sustainable development of world heritage and culture. Following the listing of the Angkor (sic) on the World Heritage List in 1992, Cambodia's engagement has increased significantly, particularly in the last ten years with the listing of the Royal Ballet in 2003, the Shadow Theatre in 2005 and the Temple of Preah Vihear in 2008.

There are a number of reasons why Cambodia is submitting its candidacy for the Committee for the first time. These reasons include the importance of the Khmer heritage and its fame around the world; the great success of the international action at Angkor with the work of the International Coordination Committee (ICC), which has been supported by UNESCO since 1993; and the increasing affirmation of our commitment to conservation and sustainable development. According to the friends of our country, all of these reasons justify why the Kingdom of Cambodia should serve as a member of the World Heritage Committee.

The relations of mutual respect and friendship that the Kingdom of Cambodia is proud to have with your country, lead us to hope that you will support our candidacy and vote accordingly.

Soliciting officially your support and your vote, I wish,
Your Excellency, to express my heartfelt gratitude and to
assure you of my highest consideration.

Prime Minister

Hun Sen (signature)

Samdech Akka Moha Sena Padei Techo HUN SEN

END TEXT OF LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Having secured membership in ASEAN in 1999 and as one of the first least developed countries to join the World Trade Organization in 2004, Cambodia continues to seek legitimacy in this and other world fora. Cambodia's candidacy for the WHC should stand on its own merits. However, on another front, given a recent move to use court defamation cases to check dissent, we should not hesitate to underline the RGC's quest for legitimacy within the international community, and to appeal for more civil political discourse as Cambodia goes through an apparent cyclical downturn in its overall political climate, including the narrowing of protections for freedoms of speech and press.

RODLEY